

Q: What's the Truth about Utah Women in the Labor Force?

A:

Somehow we have this belief that Utah women are extraordinarily different from the rest of the nation when it comes to participation in the labor force. While we're a little bit different (every state is), we're not all that different. In fact, some of the differences may surprise you.

FACT OR FICTION?

Most Utah women remove themselves from the workforce to look after their children.

FICTION. Utah's labor force participation rate (the percent of the female population over the age of 16 in the labor force) registers 62 percent—higher than the national average of 60 percent. That's partially because Utah has such a young labor force and young women are more likely to work outside the home. However, consider this—despite having larger-than-average families:

- 59 percent of married women work.
- 59 percent of mothers of preschool children work.
- 74 percent of mothers of school-age children work.

- 53 percent of mothers of preschool and school-age children work.
- 77 percent of women with no children work.

In other words, most women work—regardless of parental or marital status. On the other hand, Utah mothers do tend to work at a slightly lower rate than the national average—a situation almost definitely related to our large family size.

FACT OR FICTION? Utahns are better educated than their national counterparts.

FACT AND FICTION. Utah men are significantly more likely to have a Bachelor's degree than their national male counterparts. Utah women are not. That wasn't always the case. Prior to 1980, Utah showed a higher percentage of female college graduates than the United States. But in the last 30 years, Utah women have lagged behind the national average. In fact, Utah has the largest male/female gap in college education of any state in the nation. In addition, the Utah education gap more than doubles that of the next closest state (see chart). Since education pays off in wages, this undoubtedly accounts for Utah's large male/female wage gap—one of the largest in the nation.

FACT OR FICTION? Utahns are very family-oriented and tend to have more intact families.

FACT AND FICTION. We are family-oriented. But, while a larger share of the Utah adult population is married, the state typically shows a higher divorce rate than the U.S. Since 1965, Utah's divorce rate has measured less than the national average in only two years. The reality is, we're more likely to marry and remarry, but also more likely to divorce. In addition, divorce rates are calculated as a percentage of the total population. So, Utah's divorce rate is understated because such a large portion of our population is under the age of 18. Perhaps this propensity to divorce results from Utah having the lowest median age at the time of first marriage of any state in the nation.

FACT OR FICTION? Utah women can blame their larger-than-average wage gap with Utah men on discrimination. (The median earnings for Utah women working year-round, full-time measures only 69 percent of the median earnings for comparable Utah men.)

FACT AND FICTION. Most of the wage gap between Utah men and women can likely be explained by two facts:

- Utah women don't get as much education as Utah men.
- Utah women choose lower-paying occupations than do Utah men.

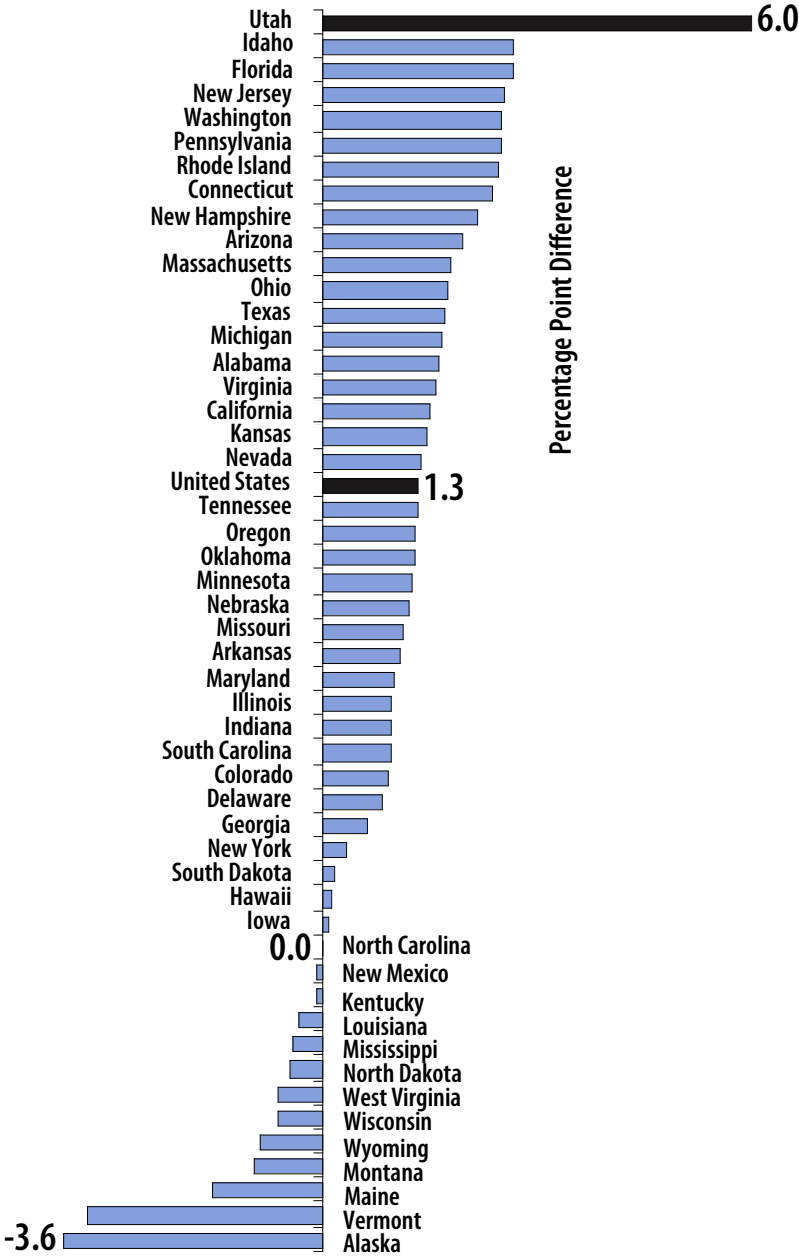
Utah women are less likely to enter occupations that pay well—particularly in those that require math and science

background—than U.S. women (who make their own share of low-paying job choices).

Other demographic factors also weigh in: women tend to have more career interruptions, have less experience on the job, and work fewer hours. However, no reputable studies have been able to completely account for the wage gap between men and women suggesting that gender discrimination does indeed still exist. ❶

Difference

in the Share of Adult* Males/Females with at Least a Bachelor's Degree



*For more information
about Utah women in the workforce, see: <http://jobs.utah.gov/opencms/wi/pubs/hardatwork>*



Is it true
that Utah women leave the workforce
to care for their children?

*25 years and older.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2008.